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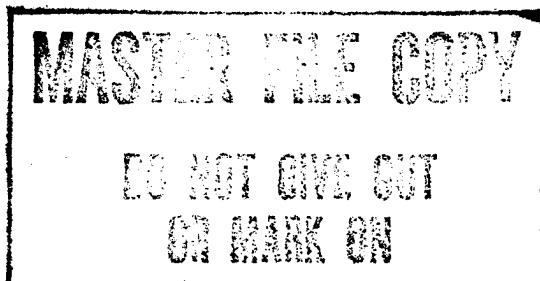
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Rivals of Hu Yaobang: Political Leadership and Succession in China

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An Intelligence Assessment



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July 1984

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office
of East Asian Analysis. [redacted]

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**Rivals of Hu Yaobang:
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Succession in China**

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 4 June 1984
was used in this report.*

Since 1978, Deng Xiaoping has labored to ensure that Hu Yaobang will lead the Chinese Communist Party for the remainder of the decade. Although Hu is not universally admired within the top ranks of the party, he remains the strongest candidate within his generation to succeed, in time, Deng. []

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We believe, however, that political power in China is structured in such a way that Hu, who now holds the nominal top post of General Secretary, cannot quickly take Deng's place and fill all his pivotal functions within the top leadership. In China, power within the party tends to gravitate toward the most experienced senior leaders, those who have developed the personal connections necessary to sustain a long political life. []

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We believe that Deng's peers—men like Li Xiannian, Chen Yun, and Peng Zhen—will decide the immediate succession. In our judgment, a member of this older generation for the near term is likely to inherit Deng's pivotal roles of political broker and final authority, while Hu Yaobang will continue to preside over, rather than rule, the party. []

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Should Hu falter, however, his place as General Secretary and eventual successor to Deng could, in our judgment, be capably filled by any of several well-qualified leaders from Hu's own generation. All have solid party credentials, occupy prominent party posts, and are supported by Deng or one or more of Deng's generational peers. We believe that Premier Zhao Ziyang and Vice Premier Wan Li are the most suitable of Hu's potential rivals for the party's top spot, even though neither man has shown a desire to advance at Hu's expense. Other national leaders such as Vice Premier Yao Yilin, party Secretary Chen Pixian, and Beijing Military Region Commander Qin Jiwei will almost certainly play key roles in the succession and in our judgment will be mainstays of the post-Deng regime. []

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Deng and his reformist allies have sought to groom a group of younger leaders who are capable of leading the party and China into the next century, but, given China's generational pecking order, this "third echelon" leadership is now too junior both in age and experience to break into the upper ranks. []

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A collective leadership arrangement involving Hu—a troika, for example—would indicate to us that the old guard had rejected Hu and was seeking to establish an alternative. We view coups by the Chinese military or by Hu and his generational peers as extremely remote possibilities after Deng goes. And even more unlikely, in our view, is a resurgence of the leftism of the Cultural Revolution era.

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This paper is necessarily speculative. We are confident that, based on our understanding of the system, we have identified the major participants in China's succession politics. We have but fragmentary information, however, on the crucial relationships between the players or on intraleadership tensions that may exist beneath the surface.

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Rivals of Hu Yaobang: Political Leadership and Succession in China

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In the nearly six years that Deng Xiaoping has been China's paramount leader, he has sought to make the political world in China safe for Hu Yaobang, his longtime protege who serves as party General Secretary. At 79 and laboring under the encroaching shadow of his own death, Deng has worked steadily to arrange Hu's accession not simply to the party's top job but to genuine party primacy.

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Deng's formal place within the party is only third (after Hu and the ailing Ye Jianying); but, despite China's acutely hierarchical system, he is broker, conciliator, and final decisionmaker. Perhaps paradoxically, it is precisely this state of affairs, in which a junior leader officially presides while the subordinate elder leader actually rules, that may force Deng's generational peers—men like Politburo members Li Xiannian and Peng Zhen—into eventual competition with Hu for recognition as the party's dominant leader. When Deng dies, the main task before the leadership will *not* be the formal selection of a new party chief—Hu already holds that post. The immediate succession issue will be to answer the more complex question: who will wield Deng's power?

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By all accounts, Deng is in good health despite a variety of minor ailments. However, because he apparently intends to remain active as long as he is physically able, his departure is likely to be abrupt, creating a leadership vacuum that must be filled quickly. By establishing Hu in the party's top nominal post, Deng has sought to head off a succession struggle and thereby break a cycle of political conflict that dates back to the 1950s.¹ Hu's political assets,

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¹ Deng cannot be encouraged by Communist Chinese precedent. Mao Zedong tried three times to select his own successor and failed at each turn (with Liu Shaoqi in the 1950s, Lin Biao in the 1960s, and the so-called Gang of Four—his wife and her radical associates—in the 1970s). In the first two cases, Mao himself overthrew succession arrangements. The Gang of Four was, of course, toppled by party regulars following Mao's death. Hua Guofeng, a compromise choice who had Mao's approval, fared little better.

In China, personnel questions, involving the distribution of power within the system, usually generate the most intense political battles. Historically, tensions over arranged succession have been *between the leader and the Politburo rank and file* over the leader's choice and, more fundamentally, over his right to choose; *between the leader and the successor* over power sharing and timing of accession to authority; and *between the successor and the Politburo rank and file* over attempts to limit the successor's future powers or even sabotage his accession.

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however, fall far short of Deng's more than 50 years of party experience, well-honed political instincts, and unsurpassed political connections. Leaders of Deng's generation like Li and Peng have the personal stature and connections within the party to vie for Deng's

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preeminent place. Moreover, the distribution of power within the party favors the old guard: elderly and increasingly frail officials clog the decisionmaking system at the top and have delayed the emergence of a younger, more active leadership that would gravitate to Hu Yaobang. []

In our view, under Deng's tutelage and backed by his political might, Hu has made steady gains in his efforts to win acceptance as the party's legitimate head. With Deng's backing, Hu became the titular party chief in late 1980 and has gradually assumed control over routine party affairs, placed a growing number of supporters in key offices, and worked to promote a reform agenda for China's party, state, and economy. We believe that, despite his political liabilities, Hu's assets are unmatched by any leader of his own generation.² As the leader who exercises perhaps the greatest day-to-day influence over the lives of the Chinese people, Hu seems comfortable in his job and conducts himself with an appropriate air of authority. In our judgment, he is secure while Deng lives. []

Hu nevertheless has a twofold succession problem. Although he is the political star of his generation, he must first contend with the influence of the party elders who, in our estimation, can assert the prerogatives of seniority to ensure that one of their own inherits Deng's preeminent authority. A small elite within the party, the party elders are Hu's immediate rivals in the post-Deng era. However, because virtually all of the veteran revolutionaries are near or in their eighties, we believe their period of maximum influence will be brief. []

The problem of the old guard aside, Hu's potential rivals over the long run will come from among his peers, the "second echelon" of China's leaders.³ If for

³ In the 1950s, Mao spoke of dividing the leadership into two "lines" of administration, with the first line responsible for daily affairs and the second—consisting of older, experienced, semiretired leaders—providing broad policy guidelines, but from a distance, without crowding the first-line leadership. Under Deng, the media have discussed not only first and second lines, but even other levels of retirement. In mid-1983, Hu Yaobang announced a variation when he claimed that the leadership consisted of three "echelons": the *first-echelon* leaders were Deng and his generational peers, who were no longer on the first line of administration; the *second-echelon* leaders were, like Hu and Premier Zhao Ziyang, attending to day-to-day business; and *third-echelon* leaders were those who were relatively young (30 to 50 or so) who would be groomed to take over from the second echelon. []

some reason Hu does not inherit the place Deng has staked out for him, his place could, in our judgment, be capably filled by any of several well-qualified younger officials whom Deng and his senior colleagues have sponsored for high posts within the party and state bureaucracies. The national-level leaders of Hu's generation in many ways are similar to Hu in experience and extent of high-level political support. They appear well positioned to occupy prominent positions in any post-Deng constellation of power: a few will presumably join Hu and Zhao at the pinnacle, the Politburo Standing Committee; others will preside over the government and military bureaucracies. []

Hu's generational peers within the leadership are not active challengers for the post of General Secretary. Among them, there are few, if any, "enemies of continuity," that is, those who would dramatically reverse policies that China has pursued since late 1978. However, political events may transform a potential rival into an actual competitor: even if these leaders are now Hu's political allies, each will be close enough to the inner circle to be conscious of—and perhaps tempted by—perceived opportunities and risks under a new regime. []

Prerequisites for Successors

Hu Yaobang is Deng's best known protege, though certainly not the only one. Deng's hand, in fact, can be seen in personnel assignments throughout the middle reaches of the party and military hierarchy. Sometimes his patronage is publicly acknowledged, sometimes not, but the vast majority of younger national- or provincial-level leaders have almost certainly had to pass Deng's scrutiny. []

Deng has not been alone in pushing proteges. His colleagues on the Politburo Standing Committee, especially Li Xiannian and Chen Yun, and other powerful national-level leaders such as Peng Zhen all have recognizable associates at or near the Politburo or Secretariat level. Indeed, in seeking to distinguish Hu Yaobang's potential rivals from the pack of promising officials, the chief qualification is backing by one or more of the party's powerhouses. Without this patronage, an otherwise strong candidate is likely to languish in the middle reaches of the bureaucracy. []

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In our view, the officials who can justifiably be numbered among China's "leaders of the future" must share several important characteristics aside from significant ties to party elders:

- A current position in the highest party or state offices—either in Beijing (Politburo or Secretariat member, Vice Premier) or in the provinces (party secretary, governor).
- A reasonable life expectancy—that is, younger than the current crop of leaders, but still old enough to be taken seriously (generally, born not earlier than around 1915).
- Long and varied service to the party—party membership that dates at least from the late 1930s. []

Other attributes are useful but cannot be regarded as indispensable. A substantial political base—whether of old cronies sprinkled throughout the central bureaucracy or the provinces or a stronghold within a single organization—is helpful but not necessary; political bases can be built after an official is raised to prominence.⁴ Neither can it hurt for a promising leader to have a creditable military record, to stand him in good stead with the Politburo's numerous soldier-politicians. Another recent asset is university education, although the deep distrust that many tradition-bound party leaders continue to hold for intellectuals somewhat limits its importance. []

Who To Watch?

Several officials from the successor generation stand out as potential rivals to Hu Yaobang. Most are from the central leadership, and we have arranged them in concentric circles according to our evaluation of their potential as candidates for the post of party General Secretary or for other key posts in the post-Deng Politburo.⁵ []

⁴ A leader often can convert the political capital that a specific party office confers into major gains. Some leaders of the successor generation, such as Hu and Zhao, already enjoy a commanding advantage by virtue of the power of their offices. Control over certain powerful offices—for example, the Central Committee's Organization Department (that is, the party's personnel office) or the security bureaus—can under some conditions become useful levers, especially in a system such as China's that tends to reward loyalty. Other top positions do not as markedly improve the prospects of their occupants. Leadership in the propaganda, foreign relations, and science and technology fields generally have not been the most promising avenues to a top place in the party. []

⁵ The use of concentric circles ("first circle," "second circle") to label groups is meant as a suggestive clustering of the leaders around an imagined center of power. It does not involve an elaborate methodology. As an organizing device, placing each individual official within a group clarifies our presentation of the estimated pecking order within China's next generation of officials. []

The First Circle. We believe Hu's most powerful potential rival is Premier Zhao Ziyang, who thus far has shown no inclination to be cast in a threatening role. Along with Zhao in the first, or inner, circle we place senior Vice Premiers Wan Li and Yao Yilin as well as a Secretariat member who has the public security portfolio, Chen Pixian. In our view, these men—whose standing is largely independent of Hu's—form the core of the second-echelon leadership and may be seen within the party as legitimate alternatives to Hu Yaobang. []

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All four men have strong qualifications: they are in their middle-to-late sixties, occupy positions of great influence, joined the party in the 1930s, exercised responsibility at an early age, and appear to have powerful sponsorship among the party elders. Three (Yao being the exception) have had successful tours in the provinces; in fact, Zhao and Chen established their reputations outside of Beijing, and both are relatively new to the capital. Moreover, Zhao and Wan have, in their old bailiwicks of Sichuan and Anhui, enjoyed clear-cut successes implementing provincial reforms, while Hu has yet to demonstrate conclusively that he can "deliver the goods." []

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Zhao is the best known of the four.⁶ He got his start as a party tough in the land reform movement in South China and, under the patronage of a powerful regional leader, eventually rose through the Guangdong party bureaucracy to become China's youngest provincial first secretary. After his return from Cultural Revolution disgrace, Zhao experienced a string of successes in three widely disparate provincial assignments, and during a four-year stint he converted faction-ravaged Sichuan Province into a showcase of economic reform. By then, Deng had already marked Zhao for national leadership. In Sichuan, Zhao departed from his earlier strongman style, refashioning himself into a technocrat and winning recognition as a tactful, innovative administrator and party leader. []

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Vice Premier Wan Li is an intriguing potential rival for the top spot—doubly so, presuming Zhao is content as premier. Wan began his career as an economic specialist (in southwest China under Deng) and by 1956, at 38, had risen to become Minister of []

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Urban Construction. Along with the backing of Deng, Wan may also have the support of Politburo member Peng Zhen, former boss of the Beijing municipal party political machine—where Wan served from 1958 to 1966 as a party secretary and deputy mayor—and still one of China's half dozen most powerful men. Precisely how Wan balances his loyalties to both Deng and Peng remains an open question, but his association with both leaders is a powerful asset. The willingness of the central leadership to delegate important troubleshooting assignments to Wan suggests his broad acceptability among diverse leaders. Wan is thought to be responsible for the rural economic reforms that have contributed to four straight years of bumper harvests.

As an economic policy maker and administrator, Yao Yilin, like Wan Li, seems to have broad appeal within the top leadership. Yao presumably has the support of his longtime mentor, Li Xiannian, as well as backing by Standing Committee member Chen Yun, the man generally credited with the final say over China's broad economic policy. Yao is probably the best educated among the top four, having studied at Qinghua University during the 1930s (he reportedly was expelled for political activism). As a career economic bureaucrat, Yao in our judgment is less important as a potential rival for Hu's job than a

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logical candidate to succeed Chen Yun as China's leading economic policy maker. His area of particular responsibility appears to be central economic planning and finance. Politically cautious, Yao is a seasoned official who will play a key role in any successor regime. [REDACTED]

Chen Pixian's background and career associations mark him as a leader worth watching, though he is not well known. His career includes a period as a senior official in the Communist Youth League, and he therefore is often presumed to be an associate of Hu Yaobang. US Embassy contacts in Hubei, where Chen served as first secretary before his assignment to Beijing, claim he has close personal relations with

Deng Xiaoping dating from the 1930s. Chen has often shared the dais with Peng Zhen at public security conferences and has shown something of Peng's hard-line inclinations. Chen's experience as party chief of Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution was similar to Peng's trials in Beijing. Both men fell early in the campaign, and both were rehabilitated long after Mao's death. Like Zhao and Wan, Chen was considered a promising young leader before the Cultural Revolution. His supervision of the crucial public security apparatus, despite having little experience in that field, is an indication of the trust he enjoys within the leadership. [REDACTED]

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The relationship between the top four and Hu Yao-bang is a topic for speculation. As the presiding officer of the party Secretariat, Hu has worked closely with all four, three of whom are members of that body and the fourth, Zhao, a de facto member who reportedly presides in Hu's absence. The views of Hu, Zhao, and Wan appear close, especially on economic policy.

[] In the four years that Hu and Zhao have occupied the top party and state posts, there has been no convincing evidence of a personal rivalry between them. The same may be said of Hu's relations with Wan, another Deng protege. []

None of the four can at first glance be labeled an enemy of policy continuity. Zhao, Wan, and Yao—together with Hu—are more closely identified with

China's current policies than any other top leaders. Chen Pixian's outlook, however, appears more provincial than the others. When the opportunity has presented itself, Chen has taken a vocal and consistently hardline position on social issues such as street crime and the challenge of "bourgeois liberalism." Although as a member of the Secretariat he is generally associated with the party's reform wing, Chen's tough attitude may make him receptive to future overtures from leaders bent on curtailing reformist policies. []

The Second Circle. Included in the second circle are prospective leaders who in our estimation are regarded in Beijing as "comers"—such as Hu Qili—or who will play substantial roles in the post-Deng Xiaoping leadership—such as Qin Jiwei. Also included are political anomalies or puzzles such as Li Desheng and Gu Mu, whose standing (and allegiance) is ambiguous

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but whose potential to play a major role through the remainder of the decade is considerable. However, the five officials we have located within the second circle each lack some important qualification or have at least one significant blemish:

- Hu Qili, despite his de facto control of the party Secretariat as “permanent” secretary, is in our judgment too young and junior in standing to be considered a colleague by party veterans who are 15 to 25 years his senior. Hu’s close career ties to Hu Yaobang (he is regarded as “the successor’s successor”) and ardent advocacy of reform strongly suggest to us that he will rise or fall with his mentor.
- Three others, Li Desheng, Qin Jiwei, and Zhang Tingfa, are career soldiers, albeit soldier-politicians, and that alone in our view will probably disqualify them from consideration for the highest party post. Since the differentiation of civilian from military leaders in the early 1950s, China has not had a leader who successfully traded a top military post for civilian leadership.⁷
- The fifth, Gu Mu, who in every other detail satisfies the key criteria, may be hindered by his political record, which apparently was tarnished in a dispute over economic allocations during 1979-80, when Gu advocated a more orthodox heavy industry focus instead of the reformists’ favored agriculture/light industry emphasis. [redacted]

The second circle is, in a sense, a waiting room for entry to the upper stratum of the succession generation. Any of the second-circle leaders can be drawn into the inner circle, and we judge that each could make a substantial contribution. Conversely, for someone like Gu Mu, who may be the only enemy of continuity within the second circle, the string may run out after Deng and the relative peace that he has imposed on national-level politics are gone. [redacted]

⁷ It seems certain that Deng has staked out for Qin, Zhang, and perhaps Li key roles in leading the Chinese military through the succession period. Younger than their fellow soldiers on the Politburo, these three are the only ones who actually command troops—all the others are in administrative or advisory positions. Politically, Li, Qin, and Zhang appear to have aligned themselves carefully with Deng and Hu. [redacted]

The Third Circle: Darkhorses. Among the dark-horses are promising “third-echelon” leaders with insufficient political experience to warrant placement closer to the center of the action. Others in this category are leaders who meet many of the criteria of suitability for the top party post but who have serious liabilities or are currently in political eclipse. In addition, several promising provincial officials appear on the brink of national prominence and merit inclusion within the third circle as remote possibilities:

- Secretariat alternate members Qiao Shi and Hao Jianxiu are third-echelon leaders put forward by the party as models for the future. Both are young and relatively unknown proteges of Hu Yaobang. Qiao has accumulated important experience and connections in the party’s foreign affairs, personnel, and administrative bureaucracies. Hao, although bureaucratically experienced, is a woman in a male-dominated political culture. She has been active mainly in areas the party considers suitable for women—textiles, youth work, and birth control.
- Tian Jiyun and Li Peng occupy no high positions within the party bureaucracy yet but are members of the Central Committee and are newly appointed vice premiers of growing importance. They appear to have substantial connections within the top leadership—Tian was part of Zhao Ziyang’s team in Sichuan—and, because of their strong technical qualifications, they also have been publicly identified as among the hope of China. [redacted]

The political careers of some once-promising officials are now in eclipse, but this may prove transitory. It is possible that the same intraleadership differences that led to their demotions, if reanimated, could create political openings for their return to national prominence:

- Deng Liqun, head of the Propaganda Department and member of the central Secretariat, appeared headed for a prominent post-Deng role but apparently has been blamed for pushing last year’s

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"spiritual pollution" campaign too far. He now appears to be a spent political force.⁸

- The reasons for dropping Peng Chong from both the Politburo and Secretariat at the 12th Party Congress remain obscure, and only Hua Guofeng's plummet has been more precipitous. Once the secretary overseeing public security, Peng now plays only a peripheral role as a National People's Congress officer. Presumably he is "available" should Hu and his program lose steam. []

The party leadership appears to be grooming some provincial officials for national positions.⁹ Among the more prominent are:

- Xiang Nan, 65, Fujian's first secretary, a youth league crony of Hu Yaobang whose transfer to Beijing and a high party post has long been rumored.
- Liang Buting, 63, Shandong's ranking secretary, another Hu associate who has served both in Beijing and in a variety of provincial assignments.
- Zhang Gensheng, about 60, permanent secretary of Jilin, who has worked for Zhao Ziyang in Guangzhou and served as vice minister of agriculture before being sent to the northeast. []

The Darkest Horse. []

[] Hua Guofeng is alive and in Beijing, despite an apparent suicide attempt. Some Chinese officials believe Hua was treated shabbily by Deng and company, but, if Hua has strong defenders within the top leadership, they have not prevented the former chairman's slide into obscurity. He reportedly has heart disease, which may simply be a cover story for a

⁸ Propagandists should not ordinarily expect to go too far in the Chinese system, however—theirs is a narrow expertise in comparison with other leaders, who are more or less generalists. The post of Propaganda Department chief has the appearance of impressive power, but here, more than elsewhere, self-inflicted political wounds are an occupational hazard. Hu Yaobang occupied the post from 1978 to 1980, and some of his current problems have their genesis in that phase of his career. []

⁹ The party often assigns officials to lower administrative levels to give them "hands on" experience before bringing them to Beijing. It is noteworthy that three of the four occupants of the first circle and, if regional military command is admitted, four of the next five leaders—Politburo or Secretariat members all—have had substantial grooming at the local level. Thirteen of the current 27 Politburo members have served in regional posts and in most cases were promoted directly from the provinces. []

more political ailment. Neither an orthodox Maoist nor fully sympathetic to Deng's program and a weak leader without a solid political constituency, Hua has at best a remote chance of returning to a high party post. []

The Importance of the Old Guard

The Hierarchy of Veterans. Survey research¹⁰ and historical precedent suggest that both mainland and Taiwan Chinese are disposed to think of political leadership not in terms of laws or public policy but as the firm guidance of one or a few strong leaders. The domination of the state and society by a Leninist party, in which a few men make all important decisions, reinforces this inclination. In China, power within the party tends to gravitate toward the most experienced senior veterans who have developed the personal connections necessary to sustain a long political life. []

We believe that political power in China is structured in such a way that Hu Yaobang, although he holds the nominal top post, cannot in the short term easily slip into Deng's shoes and fill his pivotal role within the Politburo Standing Committee, the apex of the decisionmaking system. Within this six-man elite, Deng Xiaoping, the ultimate survivor, is first among equals. Although not a dictator, Deng is a formidable political tactician with an extensive network of supporters. In the immediate post-Mao era, Deng has served as the glue holding China's leadership together and on a reformist course. China's politics is dominated by *guanxi*—simply, personal connections or "pull"—and Deng has the *guanxi* to get things done, to "deliver" where others cannot. Even his political opponents seem to regard Deng as a man of honor who keeps his end of a bargain. Few men outside the most senior leaders can approach the kind of support Deng routinely commands. []

¹⁰ See, for example, Richard C. Solomon, "Mao's Effort To Reintegrate the Chinese Polity: Problems of Authority and Conflict in Chinese Social Process," in *Chinese Communist Politics in Action*, A. Doak Barnett, editor (University of Washington Press, Seattle: 1969). []

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of Politburo-level veterans, we include septuagenarians Xi Zhongxun, Hu Qiaomu, Yu Qiuli, and Song Renqiong. []

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For a variety of reasons—not the least of which is a jealous preservation of their unique standing within the party—the elders seem to place an inordinate reliance on the collective wisdom and vision of their own generation. In our judgment, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang are regarded by their senior colleagues as distinctly junior members of the Standing Committee.¹¹ The two have been suitably deferential in their relations with the old guard, presumably recognizing that their standing after Deng's death is almost as dependent on their relations with the party elders as on the arrangements Deng has put in place. []

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The Elders as Brokers. For the immediate period following Deng's death, and not necessarily for the long run, we believe that Deng's generational peers have the power—prestige, *guanxi*, and bureaucratic connections—to decide the succession. At that time, each of the remaining old guard leaders will have chosen between allowing Hu to assume full authority or curtailing his powers by insisting on invoking their privileges of seniority. In our judgment, the majority of party elders are likely to close ranks, move down the pecking order of the gerontocracy, and look to a peer such as Li Xiannian or Peng Zhen for leadership. In making this choice, the old guard presumably would understand that they might have to repeat the process perhaps more than once. []

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The recognition of an old guard leader as Deng's actual short-term successor would be the result of the political physics that operates at the top level rather

With Deng on the Standing Committee are Ye Jianying, Chen Yun, and Li Xiannian, leaders with similar stature and length of service to the party. Ye, at 86, is politically and physically incapacitated and is rumored to be near death. Chen and Li, although both ailing, may continue to play active roles in formulating the broad guidelines of Chinese policy. In addition, we believe that other veteran Politburo members such as Peng Zhen, Wang Zhen, and Yang Shangkun are in effect members of the Standing Committee and are consulted on all major questions. At the next rank

¹¹ Perhaps because he has stood so obviously in Deng's shadow, Hu appears to have had particular difficulty establishing himself as an equal on the Standing Committee. This appears so even though Hu is virtually alone among his contemporaries in having been involved in the Chinese Communist movement from the 1920s as a "little red devil." He presumably shares much of the revolutionary veterans' commitment to the mythology of Chinese Communism and the spirit it expresses: hard struggle against seemingly insurmountable odds, the close relationship between the Army and the party, and self-reliance and the "Chinese road to socialism." []

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than the formal designation of a "first among equals": power may simply gravitate to Deng's perceived replacement. The party elders would implicitly recognize the right of one of their number to have his say on the most important issues. A regime led by a member of the old guard would almost certainly be socially conservative but in our estimation would retain Deng's policies without abusing his accomplishments. []

The transfer of Deng's power to another party elder is not tantamount to rejecting Hu. Under such circumstances, we believe it probable that Hu would continue to serve roughly in his current capacity, presiding over rather than actually ruling the party. In our judgment, the veteran revolutionaries may seek to circumvent Hu's authority but, in the interests of stability, not to displace him. []

It is conceivable that a newly dominant party elder might seek to replace Hu as General Secretary with one of the potential rivals discussed above, such as Zhao Ziyang or Wan Li. This would be difficult to achieve without serious disruption of the political system, however, and we think it unlikely. Incumbency confers a certain legitimacy on Hu—after all, Deng Xiaoping needed nearly four years to unseat Hua Guofeng. []

Less Likely Options. Alternatively, the elder revolutionaries may choose to accept Deng's arrangements—and consequently Hu Yaobang—as a fait accompli and opt to throw their collective weight behind a true second-echelon succession. They may, for instance, leave the decision to the younger officials in the Politburo, Secretariat, and Central Committee, in which case we believe Hu has the clear edge: none of Hu's potential rivals is likely to challenge him without the strong backing of the veterans. []

By stepping aside, the old guard would be seen as voting for stability and continuity, values Deng has sought to institutionalize. But loss of official position, whether through retirement or demotion, has always implicitly entailed loss of status or face as well. Because the voluntary surrender of power is rare in China, particularly for a group, Hu presumably would have to grant concessions to the elders on a broad range of policy questions and protocol issues. Deng

has been obliged to consult the elders closely and, in our judgment, Hu would be even more solicitous of their opinions. As a result, policy could become more conservative, deliberate, and dogmatic in the early stages of Hu's rule. As Hu consolidated his authority and the old guard died off, Hu's own preferences would become more evident. []

Far less likely is a post-Deng collective leadership, comprising an elder, Hu, and another younger leader. Practically, an openly and officially acknowledged collective leadership would suggest that a major segment of the old guard had rejected Hu as party leader and believed his incumbency as General Secretary was untenable in the long run. We believe the post-Deng emplacement of a troika or other collective leadership group would set the stage for serious political infighting and attendant policy uncertainty. Modern China has no precedent for an enduring collective leadership among equals, and we would expect such a leadership to last only until a new pecking order was sorted out. []

Key Considerations

It has become conventional wisdom that "the longer Deng lives, the better are Hu Yaobang's chances to succeed Deng." When Deng dies, or if he becomes incapacitated, analysts will be facing a new problem. With no obvious cleavages or factionalization within the Politburo, trends, signs, and portents become important guides to forecasting. In assessing Hu's long-term prospects, we believe the following considerations will assume key significance.

What is the state of personal relations at the top? We would expect everyone to look closely to personal and institutional interests, as political jockeying will have begun in earnest. Any sign of disagreement among the leading successors—Hu, Zhao, Wan, Yao, and Chen—probably would signify a problem for Hu rather than his potential rivals. The sudden return to prominence of a fallen darkhorse, such as Peng Chong, would indicate to us that Hu was in major difficulty. []

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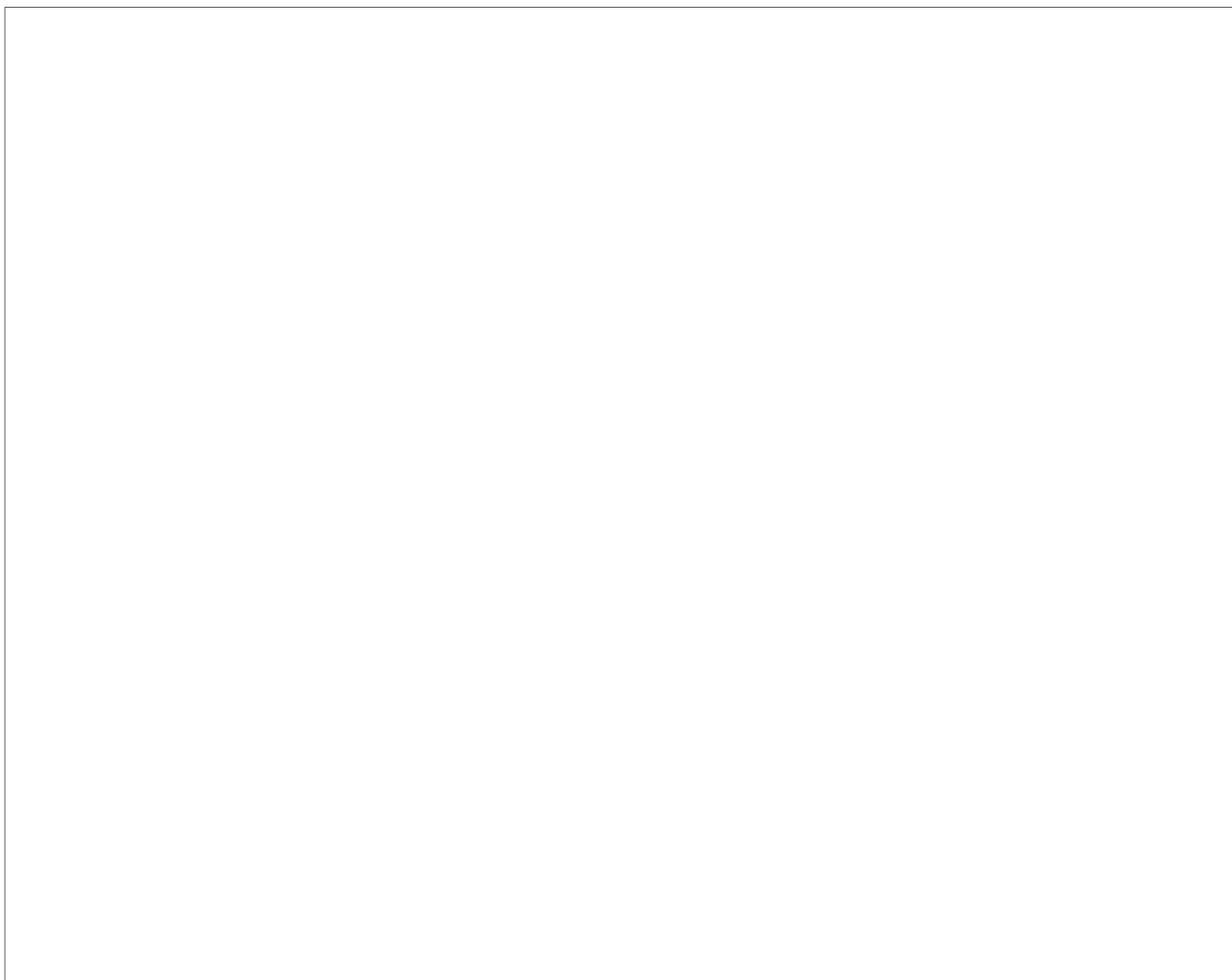
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If Deng's death appears imminent, the way Hu handles himself immediately before may be crucial. Hu may continue his efforts to build bridges to party and military elders by deferring to his seniors on the Politburo and giving new assurances that he can become leader of the entire party, not just its reform wing. A sign that Hu was seeking to do so would be his taking the lead in touting party primacy, hitting control themes frequently, and perhaps even co-opting criticism of "bourgeois liberalism." [redacted]

Who else (besides Deng) is dead? Hu Yaobang's path can be considerably smoother if Deng has outlived some of the most powerful party elders, especially Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, and Peng Zhen. If the old guard is intact at the time Deng dies, the probability

that it will choose one of its own to replace Deng is highest. Each high-level death reduces that probability. [redacted]

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How far has the party rectification progressed? Rectification policy has broad repercussions throughout the power structure. In a practical sense, Hu gains not only from the dismissal or disciplining of officials who have reservations about him in particular, but also from any rectification that results in the improvement of party performance. Any change in the attention given to this campaign will give a clue to Hu's prospects. [redacted]

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What is the condition of the economy? A strong economy proceeding along lines established by Deng, Hu, and Zhao will bode well for Hu. Poor economic performance, whether caused by men or acts of nature, would provide openings for critics to carp at the economic policies of the leadership, and particularly the reformists. []

Where are the soldiers? When Deng leaves the scene, his military posts—chairman of both the party and state military commissions—will be vacant. In his effort to gather military support, Hu may seek to line up the chairmanship of the party commission, either for himself or for an ally in uniform. Because the position must be filled by a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, this may entail elevating a supporter of Hu to the top organ, which if accomplished would itself be a sign of power. []

Estimating where the Politburo-level soldiers will stand is difficult. []

[] We believe, however, that Hu's problems are less with the Army than the party elders and that Hu can carry a majority of the senior soldier-politicians with him. We believe the key men in the succession period will be Military Commission Vice Chairman Yang Shang-kun, Chief of General Staff Yang Dezhi, General Political Department Director Yu Qiuli, and the three second-circle soldier-politicians. []

Short of violence, the soldier-politicians can—and more likely will—wield their maximum influence by playing within the rules of the game. In the succession jockeying, civilian leaders will cast about for support from the principal soldier-politicians: the career soldiers by themselves account for approximately a third of the total Politburo membership. Neither can we rule out an attempt by the senior officers to aggregate their political resources behind a single favorite candidate. Faced with a united military front and an implicit threat of violent military intervention, civilian leaders could be cowed into submission while the soldiers broker the process. []

Calling the Succession

Despite the power of the old guard, Hu's long-term prospects should not be underestimated: he is a skilled political combatant with significant support in all sectors of the bureaucracy. If opposed following

Deng's death, he may concentrate his attention first on the potential rivals, attempting to "buy them off" or discredit them in some way. Hu's limited influence within the Chinese military would make his task more difficult if the potential rival were a soldier-politician. We believe, however, that party elders would be reluctant to drag the Army into the matter and thus contradict their post-Mao efforts to politically disarm the officers. []

As succession unfolds in the immediate aftermath of Deng's departure, the party elders will be at their maximum influence. The interests of the successors, Hu and Zhao, appear best served by continuing to defer to the veteran revolutionaries, content that time will ultimately redress the generational imbalance at the top. Among the senior leaders, Li Xiannian, Peng Zhen, Wang Zhen, and Yang Shangkun will probably be the key actors, and, in the short term, one of them is likely to assume Deng's key functions. []

Having presumed that the old guard is pivotal and will probably opt for one of its own, we believe that, of all the leaders of China's second echelon, Hu Yaobang remains the strongest candidate to eventually lead the Chinese Communist Party through the 1980s. He still enjoys Deng's strong support, the principal advantage over any potential rival. Moreover, Hu continues to consolidate his grip in the party bureaucracy: known supporters have been named as Presiding Secretary of the Secretariat, and heads of the Organization Department, the General Office, and the International Liaison Department. He has emerged from the politically threatening campaign against "spiritual pollution" in a strengthened position and shows increasing confidence in the conduct of his office. In our view, any power arrangement in the post-Deng succession will include a substantial role for Hu as General Secretary. The potential "rivals" discussed in this assessment will probably become the "peers," the eventual core of the post-Deng leadership. []

Should Hu falter, his logical replacement is either Zhao Ziyang or Wan Li. Both are strongly backed and well positioned to assume command of the party.

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In our view, Zhao has carved for himself a comfortable niche as Zhou Enlai's heir, and it is unlikely that, if things were going smoothly for Hu, Zhao would mount a challenge for party primacy. We are less certain of Wan Li, who has close personal ties to both Deng Xiaoping and Peng Zhen. Peng, the "grinning tiger" who in the 1950s was Deng's rival for the post of general secretary, has the independent standing and authority within the party to try for Deng's role as first among equals, perhaps even over the objections of Deng's chosen successors. He in turn may work to advance the prospects of another younger leader, perhaps Wan. []

A number of other outcomes—premised on the breakdown of existent succession plans and a failure of consensus-generating mechanisms in a post-Deng Politburo—also bear consideration. []

The Gun Commands the Party. We believe an armed coup is an extremely remote possibility. Under conditions of escalating social disorder following Deng's death, the Army might be called on to control violence. In our view, however, China's senior military leaders would not otherwise dare to order their troops to "storm the palace" should the post-Deng team not suit them. Moreover, the system of political controls that penetrates the military structure at every level is specifically designed to alert the civilian party of putschist activity. Nonetheless, it is clear from the customary caution with which civilian leaders handle the military that, from Deng on down, they are wary of the Army and perhaps believe that a well-placed, well-organized group of armed conspirators could gain military control of China. []

Coup of the Successors. The successor generation, led by their most prominent representatives, Hu and Zhao, may decide to take matters into their own hands, ignore the old guard, and attempt immediately to consolidate the succession for themselves. This course entails unified action by the second-echelon leaders and to us seems both risky and unwarranted—by actuarial odds, the younger leaders will be in full charge in fairly short order. There are, however, several possible mechanisms they might employ to effect a "coup." If it came to a vote of confidence in the Politburo, Hu and Zhao would probably lose to the old guard bloc. It is conceivable that they would attempt to stack an expanded Politburo session or to

throw the decision to the full Central Committee, where their odds would be much better.¹² []

A successors' coup would have a greater chance of success if the ranks of second-echelon leaders could be increased on the Politburo, and especially its Standing Committee, before Deng's death. It is probable that the Standing Committee will soon lose Ye Jianying and Chen Yun. Measures such as the appointment of younger leaders to the Standing Committee and the Politburo would create conditions and a sense of momentum that might impel younger leaders to take a risk in the post-Deng era. If the elders were truly disposed to fight against Hu's consolidation of power, they presumably will insist on maintaining the generational imbalance on the Standing Committee by securing places for themselves. []

We judge that the key soldier-politicians would be unlikely to support a purge of the old guard. The political influence of the officers is very much dependent on the party elders. Nor would the successor generation itself, unless gravely threatened, be disposed to forcibly kick out the revered "veteran revolutionaries." []

The Left Resurgent. If it is presumed that Deng, by the sheer force of his personality and political connections, has been able to suppress the recrudescence of Cultural Revolution-style leftism, his death may, under some circumstances, presage an attempt by more orthodox Maoists to recapture political leadership. However, few members of the current Politburo or Secretariat would be likely to lead or even support a "leftist" resurgence, and its ostensible constituency within the 12th Central Committee is virtually nonexistent. []

We believe that Chinese leftists—though numerous at lower levels—will have few opportunities to undertake the political offensive. The Cultural Revolution and the policies it spawned are abhorred by most Chinese. The current party, state, and military structures are heavily populated with officials who were persecuted during that period and who would sternly resist a return to its policies or leaders. []

¹² In 1958, by appealing over the heads of his Presidium colleagues to the Soviet Central Committee, Khrushchev managed to retain his post as general secretary. We do not believe the Chinese leadership would throw the post of party general secretary to an "open convention," but this procedure must be considered a distinct, however remote, possibility. []

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